DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 530 CS 217 652

AUTHOR	Gregory, George Ann
TITLE	Third Grade Written Narratives: A Cross-Linguistic Study.
PUB DATE	2001-08-00
NOTE	17p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Childrens Writing; Comparative Analysis; Cross Cultural Studies; Foreign Countries; *Grade 3; *Language Usage; Primary Education; Process Approach (Writing); Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS	California; Crosslinguistic Influence; Mexico; *Story Writing; Writing Prompts; Writing Style

ABSTRACT

A study examined what a third grader might understand abcut composing a common genre like the narrative, given the degree of variance among approaches and experience. Data were collected from different school sites over a period of several years. These sites shared common geographical areas: three schools were located in the Sonoran desert shared by Arizona, California, and Baja California, Mexico; and two schools were located in the higher plateaus of New Mexico and Sonora, Mexico. Data include rural and urban populations, two languages, and various representative populations. Data represent samples from two different approaches to schooling--those used in the United States and those used in Mexico. Each group used a process approach for creating their stories, and each group used the same prompts--students were allowed to choose from one of four line drawings. The stylistic characteristics of both Mexican and Mexican American students from El Centro, California, are generally associated with written uses, whereas those of the Quechan and Dine are generally associated with conversational uses. The variation among the groups suggests some reevaluation of assumptions behind curriculums and teaching approaches. While the Mexican-American students had developed composition along with reading, their Mexican counterparts had not. Yet, generally these three groups used language appropriate to written narratives. This may reflect the overall emphasis on literacy itself. Mexico prides itself on a high rate of literacy. (Contains 2 tables, and several writing samples.) (NKA)

ED 455 530

Third Grade Written Narratives: A Cross-Linguistic Study.

by George Ann Gregory

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

G A Gregory

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CS 217 652

Third Grade Written Narratives: A Cross-Linguistic Study

George Ann Gregory, Ph.D.

Azaliah University

Introduction

Teachers worry over their students' reading abilities while often leaving their abilities to compose unexplored. Despite the need for competent writers in the workplace, curriculums have been slow to respond to developing this second half of literacy. Like approaches to the teaching of reading, there is a plethora of approaches to teaching writing. Some researchers, such as Graves (1988), have advocated the development of composition side-by-side with reading beginning with first grade. In states such as Nebraska that place emphasis on gaining basic literacy skills prior to instruction in content areas this is more of a reality than in states that promote instruction in all content areas, beginning with first grade. In those states, composition has to compete with instruction in social studies, math, and science.

Given the degree of variance among approaches and experience, what might a third grader understand about composing a common genre like the narrative? After all, they have been reading stories for three years: They should be familiar with the genre. Will this input inform their output? In other words, to what degree will the narratives written

by third grade students conform to the expectations of written narratives? That is what this study attempts to find out.

Description of the Study

Data was collected over a period of several years from different school sites. These sites shared common geographical areas: Three schools were located in the Sonoran desert shared by Arizona, California, and Baja California, Mexico; two schools were located in the higher plateaus of New Mexico and Sonora, Mexico. The data represents samples from two different approaches to schooling, i.e., those used in the United States and Mexico. It includes rural and urban populations, two languages, and various representative populations of the Southwest United States and Northern Mexico.

Each group used a process approach for creating their stories. Each group used the same prompts. Students were allowed to chose from one of four line drawings: (1) a bull with a lasso in hand riding a motorcycle and chasing a man through the desert, (2) a man zipped in a sleeping bag waking to a scorpion on his nose poised to strike, (3) a fat coyote eating watermelon in a garden with a farmer shooting off a shotgun in the background, and (4) a ram and a dog in a pickup truck—the ram is driving—coming down a bumpy road from a mesa with sheep in the background.

The three desert schools were located in El Centro, California; San Pascual on the Yuma Reservation, California; and Algodones, Baja California. The samples from the California schools were written in English. Those received from the school in Baja California were written in Spanish. Prior to participating in this study, none of the students in the Algodones, Baja California, school had been asked to compose anything. This was their first experience with composition.

Algodones is a small village on the border between California and Baja California. It provides dental and medical clinics and pharmacies catering to Americans, Canadians, and Europeans. While the village of Algodones built and maintains the school building itself, the teachers come from another village. Furnishings such as student desks and black boards were donated by a neighboring Archdiocese in the US. Parents were responsible for any school supplies. The Mexican government supplied the textbooks, which were guarded and locked up in the principal's office. Most learning was by copy work from the blackboard or through rote memorization.

In comparison to these students, the Mexican American students from El Centro were experienced writers. Most of them had been composing since first grade. The third grade students from the Yuma reservation had some limited experience with composition but not as much as their counterparts in the El Centro school. Whereas El Centro is a large urban area close to the Mexican border, San Pascual

is a rural school serving mostly Quechan—Yuma Indian—students. Because it is a public school, it also serves non-Quechan—a few Mexican-American and Anglo—students. These samples were not included in the study. Both schools had plenty of supplies, and the facilities and furnishings were new.

Two Diné—Navajo—schools, a public school in Ganado, Arizona, and a BIA school in Cañoncito, New Mexico, also contributed samples for this study. Both schools were in a rural area. The Arizona students had been composing stories for some time. Those from New Mexico had not. The second Mexican school was in Cananea, Sonora. It had been built in the later part of the 19th century by a US mining company. It was a large, stone structure with very high ceilings. Like its Algodones counterpart, the school was unheated. Also, school ran from 9 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. This schedule allows for a second session in the same building if there is a need. Here textbooks were kept in the classroom, but none of the students had ever been asked to write a story before.

Language Backgrounds

The students from Mexico were native Spanish speakers. It is assumed that the Mexican American students from El Centro had some degree of bilingualism even if passive. El Centro is a school district with a bilingual program. On the Yuma reservation, most of the speakers of Quechan are over 40. There is no evidence that any Quechan students are now speaking the language. Whether or not

there are Quechan influences on the students' English is unknown. In the two Navajo schools, an estimated 1/3 of the students were dominant Navajo speakers. Given the relative isolation of those two communities at the time, it is assumed that these students do speak a variety of English with influences from the Navajo language.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to discover what third-grade students understand about the linguistic demands of a written narrative regardless of pedagogy, language, or cultural background.

How the Samples Were Collected

The author collected most of the samples in person. In Algodones, Baja California, I was ably assisted by Dr. Carol Christy and three of our students who were bilingual: Myra Waugh, Raquel Martinez, and Diana McCann. In Cananea, Sonora, I was assisted by Anna Federico, a student, and the principal of the school, Socorro Guerrero. Dr. Christy and I collected the samples from San Pascual on the Yuma Reservation. I collected the samples from Cañoncito, New Mexico. In each case, the students were given several days to write, rewrite, and edit.

I did not collect the samples from El Centro, California, and Ganado, Arizona. However, those students used the same prompts and followed the same process of being allowed to rewrite and edit on

separate days. All the samples were collected over the course of three years and during the spring of the year.

Results

In order to tabulate and compare groups statistically, linguistic items—*past tense verbs*, *nouns*, *adjectives*, etc.—were counted. I began with an initial list of items that were deemed indicative of either written language or narrative based upon prior research. The English samples were counted first. Early statistical comparison eliminated some of these. Subsequently, other linguistic items not included in the first count were added and analyzed in later counts. Also, some samples were eliminated along the way for various reasons, such as illegible penmanship or incomplete composition. Each sample was analyzed and counted numerous times.

The Diné samples were done as one group. The ratio of samples was about 4:1 from Cañoncito to Ganado. I decided that having the two groups together was more representative of the Navajo group. However, there seemed to be differences between the two Mexican schools. In order to explore that possibility, I analyzed each school separately. I analyzed the Spanish samples based upon the final results of the English samples. Only those items that seemed to have Spanish equivalents, such as past tense, present tense, and first person

pronouns, were analyzed. I wanted to discover if the compositions by third-grade children written in Spanish would be comparable to the composition written in English by third-grade children.

T-tests were used to compare means between each group. Each group was compared to each other (see Table 2). The table below records results of items showing some degree of significance based upon these comparisons.

Table 1: Primary Characteristics by Group

Quechan-Yuma Reservation	Algodones Baja California	Pima Arizona & New Mexico	Mexican Am. El Centro	Canamea Sonora
present tense	present tense	coord conj cl	adjectives	coord conj cl
no. of words	adjectives	clause length	no. of clauses	participles
first person	nouns		participles	reflexives
But	infinitive phr		passive	nouns
prepositions			nouns	infinitive phr
that compl			infinitive phr	

The writing of the Quechan students has several features generally associated with conversations: First person, present tense, number of words, and *that* complement. *But* is used to indicate opposition to a stated premise. They are the only group to use *but* to any degree. Most of the other groups used *and* extensively to coordinate ideas. In contrast to the conversational style exhibited by the first four items, the use of prepositions is generally associated with written uses of English. Overall, the stories written by Quechan third graders have a more conversational style.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This may indicate that their knowledge of narrative comes more from hearing stories, perhaps in a conversational context, than in reading stories. Pedagogically, that suggests that for Quechan students oral uses of language have a greater influence on their written language than do written sources, such as textbooks or readers. Another way to analyze these results is that Quechan students are using written language to transcribe their oral uses of language. This mismatch between their narrative structures and that presented in a text warrants special attention by educators of this population.

The writing of the students of Algondones, Baja California, is characterized by adjectives, nouns, and infinitive phrases. All of these are consistent with the expectations of written narratives. However, the use of present tense is usually associated more with conversations. Like the Quechan, their narratives show some overlap in expectations between the two genres. However, overall their narratives are more consistent with written narrative expectations than the Quechan group. This is interesting because these students had never been asked to compose before. This may be a reflection of the emphasis in Mexico schools on reading and language development in early grades. Basically, they had received instruction in three areas: Reading and grammar, math, and social studies.

The narratives of Diné third graders like the Quechan had elements suggesting conversational uses of language. Coordinating

conjunctions used between clauses is generally associated with conversations. The longer clause length may suggest the looser construction of conversational style. In contrast, all of the primary characteristics of the narratives of the Mexican-American group from El Centro, California, are associated with written language. This may be because they have more experience with composing narratives; the writing, thereby, completes the process of acquisition of that genre.

With the exception of coordinating conjunctions, the characteristics of the narratives from Cananea, Sonora, are associated with written prose. The primary characteristics of these narratives differ slightly from the Algodones samples, which may be a reflection of differences between rural and urban language usage. Since the curriculums were basically the same in both schools, this difference must reflect language uses outside of school.

Table 2: Comparison of Means

Linguistic Item					
Present Tense* (.1)	A(6.54) >	Q(4.86)* >	D(2.51) >	MA(1.75)* >	M(*)
No. of words* (.4)	Q(125.32)*>	A(103.41)>	MA(94.25)* &	D(91.6)* >	C(72.75)
First Person* (.2)	Q(1.25)* >	D(.91) >	A(.63) >	MA(.27)* &	C(*)
Coord Conj Cl	C(8.77) >	A(8.32) >	D(5.75) >	Q(4.75) >	MA(3.29)
Adjectives	A(3.83) >	MA(3.5) >	Q(2.98) >	D(2.65) >	C(2.23)
No. of clauses	MA(15.12) >	D(14.33) >	Q(13.49)		
Clause Length	D(8.53) >	MA(7.22) >	Q(6.18)		
Participles* (.01)	MA(1.59)*&	C (1.39) >	A(1.17) >	Q(.98) >	D(.61)*
Prepositions	Q(6.31) >	MA(5.99) >	D(4.0)		
Passives * (.3)	C(4.56) >	A(4.06) >	MA(.37)* >	D(.22) >	Q(.11)*
Nouns	A(21.9) >	C(20.59) &	MA(20) >	Q(17.95) &	D(17.79)
Infinitive phrases	A(2.86) >	C(2.48 >	MA(1.64) >	Q(1.56) &	D(1.52)
that complements	Q(.76) >	MA(.42) &	D(.4)		

Coord Conj Cl = coordinating conjunctions between clauses
Participles include those used as nouns and adjectives.

In summary, the stylistic characteristics of both Mexican and Mexican American students from El Centro, California, are generally associated with written uses whereas those of the Quechan and Diné are generally associated with conversational uses.

In addition to the five groups discussed, I analyzed French samples from Quebec, Canada, and samples from Little Rock, Arkansas, for overt story markers, such as a title, "once upon a time," and "the end."

Story Markers S(2.27)>C(1.58)>F(1.14)>MA(1.06)>D(.95)&Q(.94)>A(.78)

S = Southern (from Little Rock, Arkansas)
C = Cananea, Sonora
F = French (from Ville de le Bie, Quebec)
MA = Mexican-American (from El Centro, CA)
D = Diné (from Ganado & Cañoncito)
Q = Quechan (from San Pascual, CA)
A = Algodones, Baja California

Story Markers includes titles and formulaic devices, such as "once upon a time" and "the end."

Discussion

The variation among the groups suggests some reevaluation of assumptions behind curriculums and teaching approaches. While the Mexican-American students had developed composition along with reading, their Mexican counterparts had not. Yet, generally these three groups used language appropriate to written narratives. This may reflect the overall emphasis on literacy itself. Mexico prides itself on

its high literacy rate, which is based upon completion of fourth grade. In order to ensure literacy, their early grades spend at least half the day on language activities.

The more conversational style of written narratives by Quechan and Diné students reflects the primary usage of English for these communities. Schools in the United States assume that a child who comes to school speaking English shares a common linguistic heritage with all other students in the United States. The Quechan have been involved with English speaking for a relatively short amount of time, certainly no more than 160 years. Up until W.W.II, most Diné functioned primarily in their own language.

Language represents reality (Vygotsky 1962). Part of that reality is the history and culture of the people who speak that language. When Quechan and Diné children enter school, they are entering a new culture with a new language that has a different history from their own. This is true even if the child speaks English. English has a 1600-year-old tradition of literacy. This tradition includes Beowulf, Shakespeare, Mark Twain, and Faulkner. This is not the Quechan and Diné traditions. Even today, literacy in a language assumes some familiarity with the literature of the language. That literature—and its vocabulary and grammar—represents the reality of a culture historically.

Recently, I was working with a Diné adult. He was in his early twenties. He was trying to understand the word *holier*. In trying to get

that concept, he had backtracked to *God* and *god*. He was having an incredibly difficult time getting these ideas. In working with him, I realized that those words contained thousands of years of culture—not his culture but somebody else's culture. In order for him to get it, I had to lay out as briefly as possible the history and development of various Indo-European religions. Along the way, he realized that he had only gotten a partial definition for *God* previously. Once that was cleared up, he had no difficulty in understanding *holier*.

The classic example for cultural bias against non-urban minority groups has been the standardized test question about subways. Teachers need to begin with their students' reality, but teaching cannot end there. All of these children—Quechan, Diné, Mexican-American, and Mexican—live in a world that demands a high level of literacy in order to prosper. A literate person can learn many things. Businesses have long pleaded with schools to provide adequate training in literacy so that they could train them in technology specific to their business.

Can a school take a child from another historical and cultural background and produce a fully literate graduate in twelve years? The evidence from this study suggests that greater emphasis on literacy and language development during the first three years can give students a better foundation.

References

Biber, D. (1988). *Variation across speech and writing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Graves, D. H. (1988). *Writing: teachers and students at work.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann Educational Books.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Samples

Quechan/Yuma Reservation, California

A bull on a motorcycle

I see a bull trying to catch a man. And hes riding a motorcycle. And they are at the desert in the hot sun. And a big man is running away. And the bull on the motorcycle has a rope trying to catch him with it. The man is crying because he is barefooted. And the ground is hot. the bull on the motorcycle better be careful or he might get a flat tire.

It is almost dark in the dark they better be careful or they might sit on a cactus or a goathead. And I think the bull might catch him by the neck and drag him home. And when he gets home. The bull might cook the man. and eat him with his very sharp teeth. The man might die. The End!

Diné/Arizona and New Mexico

Long time ago there was this man name Josh. He hated bird and his dog because the dog keeps eating his watermelon. The dog is very sneaky. The dog was going to eat the mans meat on the table for lunch.

Mexican American/El Centro, California

One day there was a dog by the name of Chico. He ran so fast that no dog could catch him. Then he saw food and there was a man shooting some flies. The dog Chico saw a watermelon and started to eat. Chico was the bravest dog there was. Chico ate and ate. He couldn't stop so the man just kept shooting and Chico just kept eating and suddenly Chico got mad so he ate a watermelon. He got so mad because of the noise. Then Chico bit the man and he just kept eating and that's the end.

Cananea/Sonora, Mexico

El monito se llama Manuel esta comiendo sandia. Es buena persona. Come mucho, y es jugueton, juega much con la gente, y les da de comer a la gente, y es buena persona, nunca falta al respeto. Es bonito. Es gordo. Tiene las orejas grandes. El señor lo ayuda a crecer bueno y sano. Nunca falta de comer. The end.

Algondones/Baja California, Mexico

El señor Lorenzo les estaba tirando balazos a los pajaros y el coyote se estaba comiendo las sandias de la granja, y el señor se enoja mucho y como estaba haciendo mucho calor y es de dia. Es como un campo llamado el callejon del beso, y ese campo esta muy solo, nadamas vivia un señor en una casa, y todo el tiempo estaba enojado con los animales que iban a comerse las sandia de la huerta que tenia Don Lorenzo, y habia muchas sandias muy grandes y el coyote estaba muy

contento, comiendo, estaba muy grande y muy gordo y tenia las unas muy grandes. El señor era muy pobre y comia pajaros y sandias y cuando el coyote se acabo las sandias se fue muy contento para San Luis. Fin

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Raquel Martinez, Myra Waugh, and Diana McCana for their help in gathering samples in Algodones, Baja California; Carol Christy, Ph.D. (University of Idaho) for her help in gathering samples from San Pascual Elementary School on the Yuma Reservation; Ana Federico and Socorro Guerrero for their help in gathering samples from Cananea, Sonora; Claudine Pace for the samples from Ganado Intermediate School; Lucette Côte for the French samples from Quebec; Debbie Flores for the samples from Little Rock; Ms. Gonzalez for the Mexican-American samples from El Centro; Janice Yazzie for the samples from Cañoncito; and the respective schools. I give a special thanks to Carolyn Kernberger for taking the time to read through the manuscript and help me prepare it.